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ABSTRACT

A study explored the degree to which males and females engage in social comparisons and the underlying factors that comprise and relate to social comparisons with advertising images for both boys and girls. Data were gathered from a sample of 225 females and 214 males between the ages of 15 and 18 from a midwestern high school. The same survey was administered to both boys and girls. This scale of social comparison contained 18 items reflective of the information and evaluation dimensions of the construct. Public self-consciousness and self-esteem were also measured. Satisfaction with appearance was measured with a set of 4 items logically derived for the purposes of this study. Tendency to fantasize was measured by a 4-item set of questions. Consistent with expectations, the frequency with which girls engage in ad-inspired social comparison was dramatically higher than that reported by boys. Considering that beauty is an admirable and enviable attribute for women in this society (ingrained at an early age), and that beauty is a salient attribute in many ads, it is not surprising that girls are more intrigued by and more interactive with ads that feature ideal beauty forms than are boys. Comparing personal beauty with the model's is more or less typical for many teenage girls, but atypical for boys. The effect of comparison behavior varies with girls and boys; gender plays a critical role in individual responses to advertising. (Contains 4 tables of data and 23 references.) (NKA)

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WHERE THE BOYS ARE:

AD-INSPIRED SOCIAL COMPARISONS AMONG MALE AND FEMALE TEENS

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WHERE THE BOYS ARE:
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The emergence of physical fitness as a core American value has resulted in an estimated 75% of the general population participating in least one athletic or exercise activity daily compared with 25% less than a generation ago (Netemeyer, Burton and Lichtenstein 1995). This exponential growth factor has fueled the proliferation of fitness centers and health clubs as well as a multi-billion dollar industry of health and fitness-related products and services. While beauty and physical perfection have long been the social prescription for women in this culture, the growing focus on the ideal male physique is a relatively new phenomenon. Today, however, both men and women appear to be on a quest to achieve a beautiful body and outward appearance.

One source for the excessive value placed on physical appearance for both males and females is simply the cultural imperative: American society admires beautiful and beautifully fit people. However, the media in general, and advertising in particular, in their relentless presentations of extreme beauty, have also been criticized for being at least partially responsible for America's *fixation* on beauty (Netemeyer, et. al. 1995). Beautiful female models in television and magazine advertising are frequently presented as sexy, desirable and flawlessly, if not artificially, beautiful (Irving 1990). Both male and female models are often featured in ads as the center of attention and surrounded by beautiful cars, homes and people (Feingold 1992). Moreover, while models display a level of attractiveness that is largely unattainable for most people, many people, particularly young women, look to these

prototypes of beauty as role models to emulate and as a cultural standard by which to compare themselves (Richins 1991).

Social comparison theory has enjoyed a resurgence of research interest, particularly as an implicit mechanism in the interaction between ideal beauty advertising presentations and young women. According to a number of studies that have investigated this domain of social comparison, comparing oneself to extremely beautiful models presented in today's advertising is a common behavior for many young women (Martin and Kennedy 1993; Nentl 1995; Richins 1991). However, little, if any, empirical evidence has been gathered about this behavioral phenomenon among young men.

The purpose of the present study is to help overcome this gap in the literature and begin to shed some light on the phenomenon of social comparison with models in ads among teenage males. More specifically, this study explores the degree to which males and females engage in social comparisons and the underlying factors that comprise and relate to social comparisons with advertising images for both boys and girls.

Social Comparison Theory

Festinger (1965) asserted that comparing oneself with others tends to be a spontaneous human response. However, the motivations behind such behavior tend to be more ambiguous and vary according to individual interpersonal needs. For example, Wood (1989) found that some people compare themselves with others who are inferior to them on some dimension in order to mitigate the effect of a negative attribute. Others, on the other hand, in order to learn how to improve compare themselves with and emulate others who are superior in some way. Comparison is thus a way to bolster one's self-perceptions by

providing an opportunity for self-enhancement. Finally, some people may be motivated to compare themselves with others as a means of resolving discrepancies between who they actually are and who they would like to be ideally (Higgins 1987).

Much of the existing literature on social comparison focuses on interpersonal sources. However, Festinger suggested that comparisons could also be made with "nonsocial sources." These non-social sources may include mass media presentations and advertising. This type of social comparison inspired by visual presentations is conceptualized as a two-dimensional interactive behavior whereby a person initially relies on media messages as a source of information to provide ideal standards of physical attractiveness and behavior norms. Once these norms are developed, when a need for social comparison is motivated and when specific models in the media who are perceived as ideal beauty prototypes are encountered, a person will evaluate personal attractiveness against that of the model's.

Engaging in comparisons with media models, especially those in ads, is very common among college age women (Richins 1991). In a study of high school girls, Nentl (1995) found almost 70% of her respondents compared themselves to models in ads. These findings are not surprising for several reasons. First, beauty is a prominent attribute of comparison (Richins 1991). Second, idealized beauty is pervasively reflected in advertising appealing to women (Caballero, Lumpkin and Madden 1989). Finally, public presentation and physical attractiveness are highly-valued social commodities in early dating relationships (Freedman 1984). It is not surprising that wanting to look more like the model in ads was found to be inextricably linked to the comparison process in both studies (Nentl 1995; Richins 1991).

Attractiveness also plays a prominent role in early dating patterns for boys (Sprecher 1989), and ideal masculine pulchritude is increasingly presented in advertising (Netemeyer et al. 1995). However, it is unlikely that boys engage in social comparison with models in ads to the same degree as girls for at least one important reason. This is the fact that beauty is yet to be as socially salient for males as it is for females. Thus, an attractive male model featured in an ad may not inspire high levels of comparison among the boys, and boys may, in general, be less inclined to evaluate their own level of attractiveness. Nonetheless, it is believed that boys may engage in some level of this type of comparison.

Dimensions of Social Comparison with Models in Ads

As mentioned earlier, there are likely to be multiple aspects of engaging in social comparison. One element may revolve around the motivations for participating in this behavior. One may engage in social comparison to learn information about how to change, or to influence self-perceptions. Although outcomes of social comparison were not a central focus in Festinger's work, he did concede that feelings of inadequacy could result from comparing with superior others. Wood (1989) found support for this belief noting that engaging in upward comparisons often results in injuring one's self-esteem. Research on the impact of exposure to attractive models in ads on young women has shown that while these ads do not affect their perceptions about their looks, they do negatively impact their satisfaction with themselves and their overall self-esteem (Irving 1990; Martin and Kennedy 1993; Nentl 1995). As a result, we might expect that social comparison might incorporate the degree to which the behavior occurs, the motivations for it and the outcome of this activity. Differences in each element between males and females are highly likely.

However, the biggest differences may emerge in the degree to which engaging in this behavior leads to negative outcomes. The smallest differences are likely to be over the use of social comparison to learn about how to look or dress.

Antecedents of Social Comparison

The psychological literature and previous research on women suggest that there will be several variables that will affect the degree to which people engage in social comparisons with models in ads. Among these are public self-consciousness, self-esteem and satisfaction with appearance (Nentl 1995).

People high in public self-consciousness fear social rejection and ameliorate that fear by emulating and conforming to the cultural-determined ideal (Doherty and Schlenker 1991). Young women who have this characteristic are particularly vulnerable to fashion trends and appearance-related fads and tend to be heavy cosmetic users (Solomon and Schopler 1982; Miller and Cox 1982). Therefore, since the media are dominant presenters of these socially-approved trends and preferences, teenagers who score high on public self-consciousness are more likely to engage in comparison with models to gauge their level of appearance against that of the social ideal. While this may be somewhat more true for girls than boys, both are expected to be affected.

Self-esteem has been shown to be related to social comparison for women. Young women who have lowered self-perceptions tend to compare themselves with models more often (Nentl 1995). A prime motivation for making these comparisons with beautiful models is for self-enhancement (Martin and Kennedy 1993). This type of upward comparison is a way to self-improvement or a source of inspiration, and a way to become superior. Many

ads provide for this possibility of self-enhancement through use of specific brands or by examining what attributes make the model in the ad appealing.

With regard to satisfaction with appearance, high appearance satisfaction attenuated comparison activities. When a woman thinks she is attractive and feels satisfied with her body, she is likely to have less need to look to the ads to compare with and/or improve herself. However, when a woman is less satisfied and seeking self-assurance about her appearance and desires to enhance or change her self-image, she tends to use the presentations of beauty both as a cultural ideal to emulate and as a standard for comparison. Steiner-Adair (1986), found that self-esteem, self-confidence and even anxiety levels fluctuate for women depending on their perceived body image and how they feel about the way they look. When these attributes are high, there is less of a motivation to engage in social comparison.

One additional variable has been found to significantly contribute to the variance accounted for in women's level of social comparison (Nentl 1995). This variable was a propensity to fantasize. This ability to imagine oneself differently may explain the degree to which people compare themselves with images of beauty shown in the media. The promotion of fantasy through advertising, particularly via artificially-created beauty, voluptuousness and overt sexual themes, underlies many advertising strategies; wanting to be like or look like the model will enhance purchase intention. While fantasizing is not thoroughly empirically investigated as an interactive behavior with advertising in the present study, the propensity to fantasy will be explored as a correlate of social comparison for both males and females.

Most of the expectations regarding engaging in social comparisons and psychological

antecedents are based on research that has just examined women. One of the purposes of this study is to determine if similar constructs also serve to motivate social comparison with advertising models among young men. While sociocultural influences about appearance are stronger for females than males (Burton, Netemeyer and Lichtenstein 1995), public self-consciousness, self-esteem and satisfaction with appearance are presumed to be psychological characteristics that are relatively common for both males and females. It is therefore expected that the variables influencing the comparison process for the girls will also apply to boys, although perhaps to a lesser degree.

METHOD

Data were gathered from a sample of 225 females and 214 males between the ages of 15 and 18 years old from a Midwestern high school. The same survey was administered to both the boys and the girls. The instrument included several scales measuring expected antecedent variables and a recently created scale designed to measure social comparison behavior with advertising (Nentl, Wilson and Faber 1995). This scale of social comparison contained 18 items reflective of the information and evaluation dimensions of the construct. A reliability alpha for this scale was .88.

Public self-consciousness and self-esteem were measured using the Fenigstein Public Self-Consciousness scale (1975) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (1965). Cronbach's reliability alphas for these scales were .81 and .87, respectively. Satisfaction with appearance was measured with a set of four items logically derived for the purposes of this study (alpha = .94). The four questions were "How satisfied are you with how you look?" "How satisfied are you with your body?" "How attractive do you think you are?"

"How attractive do you think other people think you are?"

The tendency to fantasize was measured by a four-item set of questions: "I frequently daydream," "I find it easy to lose myself in a film," "Compared to others, I have a very active fantasy life," and "When I see a movie, I often think what it would be like to be one of the characters." Although low, the coefficient alpha of .57 was deemed adequate for the goals of this study.

RESULTS

Close to 70% of teenage girls agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "I compare myself to the models I see in ads." However, when boys were asked a similar question, the results differed dramatically with more than 70% disagreeing with this statement. Thus, the supposition that boys are considerably less active comparers than girls was supported.

To contrast the underlying dynamics of the comparison process between boys and girls, a factor analysis of the 18 social comparison scales was computed and compared with the factor structure derived from the data from girls. Only factor loadings greater than .6 were retained for analysis. (See Table 1.) For the girls, two factors--a Negative Evaluation Factor (eigenvalue = 5.74) and an Information Factor (eigenvalue = 1.63)--emerged from the data. The total variance accounted for by these two factors was 56.9%. The ten-item primary factor, the Negative Evaluation Factor, indicated that items related to feeling less attractive than and wanting to look more like the model were intertwined with the comparison behavior items.

A three-factor analytic structure emerged from the boys' data. The Negative Evaluation Factor (eigenvalue = 7.85), the Compare Factor (eigenvalue = 1.82), and the Information Factor (eigenvalue = 1.14) accounted for 52.4% of the total variance. The six negative, affective items thus produced the primary and separate factor, and were not integrated with comparison behavior items, as was the case with the girls. The second factor for the boys, the Compare Factor, had three items which represented both the behavioral component and perceiving the model as the social standard for comparison. Two items comprised the third factor from the boys' data, the Information Factor. This factor was defined as relying on advertising as a source for current fashion trends and social preferences.

These divergent results from the two factor analyses demonstrate that the dynamics of this ad-inspired comparison behavior are not completely analogous for females and males.

TABLE 1
FACTOR ANALYTIC STRUCTURE COMPARISON

MALES

	NEG.EVAL. FACTOR	COMPARE FACTOR	INFORMATION FACTOR
I wish I was as good looking as the guy in the ad.	.84		
I wish I could change something about myself when I see the guys in the ads.	.76		
I feel less good looking than the guy in the ad.	.74		
I wish I had a build like that.	.71		
I wish I was as popular as the guy in the ad appears to be.	.64		
I think I should change myself to look more like the guy in the ad.	.63		
I compare my build to the guy's build I see in an ad.		.82	
I frequently compare myself to the guys I see in the ads.		.80	
I use the guys in magazines and TV as a yardstick to measure how good I look.		.75	
I get ideas about the brands I want to buy.			.77
I get ideas about how to look or dress.			.68
EIGENVALUES	7.85	1.82	1.14
Variance Accounted for:	33.8%	9.6%	9.0%

FEMALES

	NEG.EVAL. FACTOR	INFORMATION FACTOR
I wish you had a body like the model in the ad.	.82	
I feel less good looking than the model.	.80	
I wish I was as good looking as the model.	.79	
I frequently compare myself to the model in the ad.	.77	
I wish I could change something about myself when I see models in ads.	.77	
I don't think about how I look.	-.68	
I compare my body to the model's body.	.70	
I use models in magazines and TV as a yardstick to measure how good I look.	.70	
I feel good about the way I look.	-.69	
I think I should change myself to look more like the model in the ad.	.62	
I get ideas about how to look or dress.		.81
I get ideas about the brands I want to buy.		.79
Advertising gives me a good idea about how to look and act.		.66
People in ads show what the "in" thing to wear or own is.		.65
EIGENVALUES	5.74	1.63
Variance Accounted for:	46.2%	10.7%

Summed factor scores were created for all respondents based on the items loading on the three factors for the boys. T-tests were then conducted to compare the degree males and females endorse each of these components (see Table 2). The results of these t-tests indicated that the girls scored significantly higher than the boys on each of the three factors.

Mean scores from the boys and girls on the four personality scales were also compared using t-tests. (See Table 3). In each case, significant differences were found by gender. Girls scored significantly higher than boys on public self-consciousness and fantasy. On the other hand, boys scored significantly higher on self-esteem and satisfaction with appearance than girls.

The final phase of this study investigated whether the four personality variables significantly contributed to explaining the degree of social comparison engaged in by both females and males. Previous research has suggested that these variables should relate to social comparison for women, but little information exists to indicate whether this would also be true for boys. The results of a stepwise regression analysis indicated that for the female respondents, the best predictor of comparison behavior was public self-consciousness (see Table 4). The next best predictor of comparison behavior was low satisfaction with appearance, followed by the propensity to fantasize. The high correlation between satisfaction with appearance and self-esteem resulted in a non-significant F change for self-esteem in the regression analysis for the girls. In other words, self-esteem did not contribute significantly to the prediction of comparison behavior when satisfaction with appearance was already entered in the equation.

TABLE 2
T-TEST RESULTS FOR SUMMED FACTOR SCORES
BETWEEN FEMALES AND MALES

	MEAN SCORES				
	FEMALES	MALES	T-VALUES	DF	P VALUES
COMPARE FACTOR	8.5	5.9	9.14	433	.01
NEGATIVE EVALUATION FACTOR	25.1	18.7	10.14	426	.01
INFORMATION FACTOR	7.6	5.9	7.95	432	.01

TABLE 3
T-TEST RESULTS FOR PERSONALITY SCALES
BETWEEN FEMALES AND MALES

	MEAN SCORES				
	FEMALES	MALES	T-VALUES	DF	P VALUES
Public Self-Consciousness (45 possible points)	35.9	33.1	3.75	418	.01
Self-Esteem (50 possible points)	32.6	41.6	-6.25	423	.01
Satisfaction with Appearance (40 possible points)	23.0	26.9	-4.22	425	.01
Propensity to Fantasize (20 possible points)	12.7	11.7	3.71	427	.01

TABLE 4
RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS
PREDICTING SOCIAL COMPARISON BEHAVIOR
BETWEEN FEMALES AND MALES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	FEMALES	MALES
Public Self Consciousness	.52**	.39**
Self-Esteem	-.09*	-.22**
Satisfaction	-.26**	-.07*
Fantasy	.19**	.15**
Overall R squared	.20	.40

** Significant at .05
* Non-significant

For the boys, public self-consciousness was also the best predictor of social comparison. Self-esteem and the propensity to fantasize were also significant predictors of comparison behavior. Satisfaction with appearance, however, was not a significant contributor here. Further analysis showed that there was not a high correlation between satisfaction with appearance and self-esteem in the boys' data as had been observed in the girls' data. Therefore, this did not mask the potential contribution of satisfaction with appearance to the prediction of social comparison behavior.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to determine whether the high degree of ad-inspired social comparison behavior among young females could be detected among young males. Another objective of the study was to investigate whether the underlying conceptual understanding of social comparison among young females holds for young males. The study also sought to determine if psychological antecedents thought to be critical to the comparison process for girls would play similar roles for boys.

Consistent with expectations of the study, the frequency with which young girls engage in ad-inspired social comparison was dramatically higher than that reported by young boys. Considering that beauty is an admirable and enviable attribute for women in our society, and one that is ingrained at a very young age (Striegel-Moore 1986), and that beauty is an enormously salient attribute in many ads as well as the comparison process (Richins 1991), it is not surprising that girls are more intrigued by and more interactive with ads that feature ideal beauty forms than are boys.

Although the act of comparing one's level of beauty with that of the model's is more or less typical behavior for many teenage girls, a number of reasons may account for why such behavior is rather atypical for teenage boys. First, for boys, ad-inspired comparisons may be supplanted by a more interpersonal type of comparison behavior. That is, just as girls look to the beauty models for evaluation and validation, boys may look to their peers to be validated and as a basis for comparison. This mode of comparison among these youngsters may be the type of interpersonal behavior originally outlined by Festinger (1954), where the "nonsocial source" comparisons such as the media are subordinated to comparisons with a reference group.

Another reason for lower levels of comparison behavior among the boys may stem from the fact that the extremely idealized "hard body" look of many male models prominently featured in ads is simply unattainable for a number of boys, particularly for gangly teens who have not yet reached their full physical development. Several authors suggest that people are most likely to make comparisons with similar rather than with dissimilar others (Festinger 1954; Wood 1989). The substantial incongruity of appearance between the model and the boy may be why these extreme male body forms do not inspire the level of comparison activity among teenage boys. Granted, this may also be true for young girls who have yet to develop physically. However, female models are often more heavily adorned than male models and display a number of other salient attributes that serve as points of comparison such as the model's makeup, hair, nails, etc.

Finally, the relatively low comparison behavior among boys may be because the male model in the ad is not the object of attention for boys. In an open-ended question included on the survey, many boys said that they were likely to compare themselves to the males they see in the ads when the model was surrounded by beautiful females or by desirable objects such as "hot" cars or trucks, or if the model was a skillful athlete or involved in a sport. Consequently, it is not the extraordinary look of the model that they want to achieve, as may be the case with the girls, but it is the objects *surrounding* the model that they would like to acquire. Future research might help to determine the relative contribution of these various explanations for why females engage in more social comparison with models in ads than males.

The underlying concept of ad-inspired comparison appears to be different in important ways for boys than for girls. While both boys and girls tend to seek the ads for

information about current fashion, the effect of comparison behavior varies. For girls, feeling less attractive than the model was embedded in the comparison process. For boys, however, comparison behavior and wanting to look more like a cultural preference were not intertwined. When boys do compare themselves to male models, feeling inferior is not an automatic response. While it appears true from the primary factor that there is a desire among males to conform to what is perceived as a cultural preference, that desire is not necessarily spawned by making comparisons. What may be resonating is a type of band wagon effect produced by the pervasive nature of presentations of beauty in advertising. That is, the sheer abundance of idealized beauty presentations in advertising may cultivate the idea that beautiful people are not the exception but in fact the norm (Feingold 1992). Rather than to emulate the model in order to be so attractive as to stand out from others as appears to be the case for the girls, boys may merely wish to conform to what they believe has become a cultural norm of appearance in order to blend in with others.

Of the personality characteristics thought to moderate social comparison behavior, the common denominator for both groups among those who do engage in comparisons with the ads is having high social awareness and an identity that relies on social approval. There is little question that vulnerability to social opinion is a common phenomenon among teenagers. The high school years, the start of dating for both boys and girls, are a time when both appearance and social approval are particularly important (Freedman 1984). Thus, the importance of maximizing social appeal becomes paramount. Both male and female models in ads represent the epitome of social desirability, and implicitly convey to those who are socially defined that attractiveness and "being cool" are vital components of peer approval. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that, like the girls, the boys who do interact with advertising models do so to gauge how socially appealing they are in

comparison to the perceived ideal and to get ideas about how to enhance their personal attractiveness. Looking to the ads then becomes an important way to bolster self-image and increase popularity.

The two other variables that contributed to the prediction of comparison for females were satisfaction with appearance and the propensity to fantasize. The high correlation between self-esteem and satisfaction with appearance resulted in satisfaction being the only variable necessary to explain comparison behavior. The addition of the self-esteem variable into the equation added little new information in explaining variability. It is thus apparently true that for many young girls, feeling good about oneself is inextricably linked to feeling good about one's appearance. Since a girl learns at a very early age that beauty begets favor and power, and streams of social and media themes of beauty persistently reinforce that belief as she matures, it is not at all surprising that not being happy with the way she look results in not being happy. It is also not at all surprising that a young girl would perceive a beautiful model in an ad to be the cultural standard bearer, and use the ad to learn how to boost both her appearance and her self-confidence.

For the boys, the self-esteem and fantasy variables were the other predictors of comparison behavior. Satisfaction with appearance did not play in the process nor was this variable tied to self-esteem. Physical attractiveness is apparently neither as salient an attribute for males in the comparison process nor as central to a male's identity as it is to a female. However, while improving appearance is not the motive behind a boy comparing himself to a male model, he may be attempting to bolster his self-esteem by looking to the ads to learn how to enhance himself in other ways. For example, he may be looking to the ads as a source about how to dress or what brands are currently in vogue, as the Information Factor suggests. He may also use the ads to learn how to act and/or perform

with his peers or with members of the opposite sex. However, while satisfaction with appearance was not sufficient cause for comparison with the models, there is some evidence that appearance may be becoming increasingly important to males. A recent study indicated that males tended to overestimate the musculature of the ideal male body and to substantially inflate the chest size they believe women prefer (Netemeyer and Adele 1995). Moreover, as the media continues to feature idealized male bodies, personal appearance may become a more salient social attribute in the ad-inspired comparison process.

The differences between the boys and the girls on the personality scales were interesting. Although the girls did score somewhat higher than the boys, it was not surprising that both boys and girls in this age group scored relatively high on the public self-consciousness scale since adolescence is a time of peer prominence and magnified social awareness (Freedman 1984). What was surprising, however, was that the boys scored so high on the self-esteem scale. Adolescence is thought to be time of uncertainty and feeling conspicuous about oneself and one's appearance. This notion was evidenced far more among the girls than the boys in this sample. Interestingly, while the boys scored significantly higher than the girls on satisfaction with appearance, the magnitude of this difference was not great. It is possible that compared to the girls, how good the boys feel about themselves has little to do with how good they think they look. The source of self-confidence for boys may come from other sources of their identity. For example, academic or athletic prowess or popularity with the opposite sex may influence how boys feel about themselves. Further research could pinpoint more relevant and concrete factors that contribute to a young boy's positive self-image. For example, evidence has shown that, whereas beauty persists as a prominent source of worth and self-esteem for women, as

men mature, they tend to be valued more for their earning potential and financial security than for their appearance (Smith, Waldorf and Trembath 1990; Sprecher 1989). It may be that, even at this young age, a male's self-esteem comes from what he does or who he's with rather than what he looks like (Rodin, Silberstein and Striegel-Moore 1984).

Another point of interest from the personality scores is the difference between the two groups on the fantasy scale. Girls demonstrated a greater propensity to fantasize than the boys. This result may be evidence that the tendency to fantasize among girls is, like the cultivation of beauty, a product of early socialization. With seductive toys such as Barbie dolls and animated figures like shapely Pochahontas, even very little girls are encouraged, as they engage in imaginative play, to fantasize about having beautiful, sexy bodies and gorgeous, flawless faces.

Generally, the results of this study suggest that gender plays a critical role in individual responses to advertising. The level of engaging in social comparison and the likelihood of it leading to negative consequences differ by gender. However, this behavior has some common antecedents for both males and females. A need for social approval and, secondarily, a tendency to fantasize, significantly predicted social comparison behavior for both the boys and the girls. Additionally, self-esteem significantly predicted this behavior for the boys and would have for girls as well had it not been masked by a strong correlation among the girls with satisfaction with appearance.

There are several important areas of future inquiry for the greater understanding and testing of fantasy as a viable component of media effects, not the least of which is the investigation of the dark side of the promotion of fantasy through beauty advertising. Does fantasizing about looking like a model produce a longing so acute that it creates grave body image distortions and unhealthy eating or compulsive exercising in an attempt to emulate

this ideal? Could this be a problem for some boys as well as girls? While, at the moment, young males appear to be somewhat invulnerable to the steroid look of the male body form featured in many advertisements, the high participation in fitness-related activities and the evolution of fitness and health as core American values suggests that this may not always be the case. The growing focus on body shaping and fitness for men may eventually result in the same type of vulnerability to such ads that we now see in women.

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